DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 205 249 JC 810 480

AUTHOR Chaffee, John
TITLE The Role of Ethics in Education: A Practical Example.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; *Ethics; *Individual Development; Instructional Materials; Interdisciplinary Approach; *Local History; Two Year Colleges; *Values Clarification

ABSTRACT

In spite of an increased emphasis on technical training within the college curriculum, there is a growing realization that the humanities in general and ethics in particular are vital to the student's personal development and moral enlightenment. Accordingly, LaGuardia Community College, with the financial backing of the National Endowment for the Humanities, is conducting a Public History Program (PHP) that integrates literature and ethics in the exploration of five topics related to the local history of the Borough of Queens (New York): transportation, work, housing, leisure, and aging. Through seminars, learning packages, traveling exhibits, calendars, and broadsides, the PHP attempts to identify the central values woven into these historical issues. Since differing personal values, which are not often consciously recognized, cause confrontations between individuals and groups, this ethical examination should open lines of communication between people, demonstrate the insignificance of many interpersonal disputes, provide a clearer understanding of students' own values and the values of others, and allow individuals to take more control over the forces that govern their lives. Appended to the paper are examples of the ethics materials developed for the PHP learning packages, which raise ethical questions for discussion related to work, the social costs of progress, and the themes of an exhibit of housing photographs. (JP)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED205249

# THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN EDUCATION:

# A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

by

Dr. John Chaffee

LaGuardia Community College

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

John Chaffee

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

JC810480

# THE ROLE OF ETHICS IN EDUCATION: A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE

DR. JOHN CHAFFEE
LAGUARDIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In the recently issued The Humanities in American Life, authored by a commission of outstanding scholars, attention is drawn to the crucial role which the study of ethics plays in the development of mature individuals and responsible citizens. Working in concert with other humanistic disciplines which also encourage critical thinking skills, the study of ethics provides a framework incorporating moral discipline and moral discernment, a framework within which intelligent and enlightened moral decisions can be made. With an increasing emphasis by colleges and universities on technical, specialized and so-called "practical" skills, the question arises whether students are being deprived of the encouragement and stimulation necessary for personal growth into morally enlightened and socially conscientious human beings. Far from being "impractical," the development of the types of critical thinking skills found in the humanities in general and in ethics in particular is of crucial importance on a much more profound level of practicality, as the authors of this report suggest in the following passage.

> If to grow in wisdom -- not simply in cleverness, or dexterity, or learning -- is practical, then the humanities, properly conceived and conveyed, are decidedly practical. They help develop capacities hard to define clearly and without cliché: a sharpened critical judgement, a keener appreciation of experience. Study of the human-

ities makes distinctive marks on the mind: through history, the ability to disentangle and interpret complex human events; through literature and the arts, the ability to distinguish the deeply felt, the well wrought, and the continually engrossing from the shallow, the imitative, and the monotonous; through philosophy, the sharpening of criteria for moral decision and warrantable belief. (pg. 12)

How can these goals be achieved? Clearly there is not simply one path, but many which must be pursued. One such path I am currently involved in is in my capacity as Ethics Advisor to an NEH funded Public History Program. The purpose of the project, directed by Richard Lieberman and Janet Lieberman of LaGuardia Community College, is to conduct a community based public history program designed to stimulate and develop neighborhood interest in local history, focusing on the borough of Queens, N.Y. The program utilizes seminars, learning packages, traveling exhibits, calendars and broadsides. One of the truly innovative aspects of the project is its interdisciplinary approach which integrates literature (coordinated by Sarah Barber of LaGuardia C.C.) and ethics in the exploration of historical themes.

As Ethics Advisor, my role has been to add a philosophical dimension to this very successful project by identifying the central values woven into the historical issues which the grant is concerned with, and to encourage people first to be aware of these values, and then to examine them in a critical and reflective fashion.

Almost every significant decision which we make in our lives reflects certain values which we feel are important and which we are

committed to. In many cases, these values are not consciously recognized by us. Instead, they are merely assumed to be correct on a more or less unreflective level. Thus when a confrontation between people or groups with different values takes place, people are not always aware of the real issues under dispute. More often than not, the unfortunate result of this is bewilderment, fear, chaos, and above all, anger.

This is particularly true in the case of neighborhood life and neighborhood history. For example, issues such as:

the potential placement of a drug rehabilitation center or a sewage treatment plant

the proposed path of a new roadway or subway line

the change in the racial or ethnic make-up of a neighborhood

opportunities and discrimination in the job market, based on sex, race, or being handicapped

management vs. employee, including pay scales, strikes, lock-outs, etc.

With all of these issues, and others like them, people tend to have expremely passionate feelings, and an attitude of intolerance normally reserved for religion, politics and sports mania. And when opposing sides engage under these conditions, the results are usually explosive, and potential lines of communication are shattered.

One solution to this very unsatisfactory situation is to insist on taking a critical, reflective, and systematic approach to the issues at hand, and towards the underlying values which they reflect. By

identifying these basic values and dragging them out into the light of day in a structured, organized and critical fashion, a number of beneficial occurrances can result.

Lines of communication remain intact, insuring a reciprocal flow of ideas, and a gradual mutual understanding and appreciation for the views of others.

Disputes are often found to be based on differences or misunderstandings which are superficial rather than substantive.

A clearer understanding of our own values will help us understand why we behave the way we do, and will thus help us control and direct our behavior. We may also find that our values are in need of revision.

A clearer understanding of the values of others will aid us in empathizing with their situation, and where substantive differences exist, to discuss these in an orderly and intelligent fashion.

By understanding the historical development of values and the decisions which have resulted from them, we can better understand and effectively control the forces shaping our lives. Intelligent living requires not simply the making of informed choices, but also taking a hand in shaping and creating the alternatives from which we have to choose.

This Public History Project has singled out five themes to be explored: transportation, work, housing, leisure and aging. Each theme is approached in terms of:

History -- which sets the scene, determines the focus, assembles documents, and basically tells the story.

Literature -- which illuminates and enriches the historical themes through thematically selected books, passages and quotations.

Ethics -- which identifies and examines the value scaffolding upon which the historical tapestry is hung.

Attached are examples of ethical material developed for inclusion in

the first three learning packages under the category "Things to Think About and Discuss." The aim of this material and other material like it is threefold:

To raise key ethical questions central to the themes of the package

To stimulate a critical exploration of these questions;

To gain the recognition that these questions not only help us understand the past, they also (and much more significantly) help us understand ourselves -- who we are and where we are going.

These ethical issues are issues which are rooted in our life experience. Our ability to understand and to successfully deal with these critical issues will determine what our future will be: individually, in terms of the sort of people we will become, and collectively, in terms of the world we will create for us all to live in. The wisdom of the choices which we make will be directly related to our degree of ethical awareness, our freedom from constraint, and our determination to pursue the values we think are right.

Seen in this light, there is nothing more crucial to a person that the maturity which comes from an ongoing critical examination of his experience in general, and his values in particular. Values lie at the heart of our experience, and serve as the catalysts for action; ethical inquiry gives us the opportunity to illuminate the meaning of that experience, and the ability to shape our lives in consonance with a morally enlightened awareness.

The Queensboro Bridge - Things to Think About and Discuss

The Price of Progress

Most ambitious human endeavors carry price tags, and "progress" is one which usually exacts a heavy price. For example, the Queensboro Bridge construction cost not only dollars, but also the lives of 50 men. Its erection also had a dramatic impact on the lives of millions of people. On the positive side of the ledger, the bridge opened the borough of Queens for industry and housing. The negative side is well expressed in the first two stanzas of The Builders, a poem by Witter Bynner.

Where that corner-house then stood,
Where your room was, and our talks,
Laths and doors and tumbled bricks
Pile their dust upon the walks.

No slow torch it is of time
No quick blast of magic fire
But the sure, destroying hand
Of the builders, building higher.

Progress often means the severing of our links with the past -- the destruction of existing neighborhoods with traditions and human relationships, the loss of landmarks and historic houses, the elimination of grass, open-space and wildlife. The construction of the bridge determined the fate and character of Long Island City; transforming a rural/residential area into an industrial mecca, replete with large factories and mammoth railroad yards.

There was a time in our nation's history when "progress" was a god we worshiped, and unrestricted and unplanned development was accepted without question. This is no longer the case, as there is the growing recognition that bigger is not necessarily better, that new development often destroys things which cannot be replaced. Out links to the past are not expendable -- they give us a sense of continuity, of tradition, of identity. By telling us where we came from, they enable us to see more clearly where we should be going.

The future is everyone's responsibility. What happened in the past was not inevitable. It was determined by human decisions made by human beings, the same way that the future will be determined. We must encourage growth which is thoughtful and planned, without burying the historical roots from which we have sprung.

H.L. Mencken, the newspaperman, once said: "To every complex question there's a simple answer -- and it's wrong!" These are difficult questions with difficult answers, but it is our responsibility to address them as best we can, for we are the shapers of tommorrow's future.

Jess Manyoky - Things To Think About and Discuss

Transition From "Craft" to "Clock"

Jess Manyoky started working for the Steinway Piano Co. crafting individual pianos by hand. As the company grew and technology increased, he moved into a management role overseeing other workers, and getting paid by the hour instead of by the piano.

a) When a person is personally responsible for creating or producing something, how does he feel towards the product of his skill and handiwork? How does he feel about the value and worth of himself?

b) When a person is responsible for only one specialized step in the production of something, does he feel differently towards it? If he feels that he is simply a "cog in the machine," does he feel differently about his own value and worth?

"We have much studied and much perfected of late, the great civilized invention of the division of labor, only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labor that is divided, but the men;... divided into mere segments of man... broken into small fragments and crumbs of life so that the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin or the head of nail."

John Ruskin The Stones of Venice

Why Do We Work?

Most people work for two general reasons:

To survive by earning a living.
For personal meaning and fulfillment.

a) If you work only to earn a living, and not for meaning or personal fulfillment, how do you experience your work? Is your work an expression of yourself, or are you simply "marking time?"

b) If your work is meaningful and fulfilling, what sort of feelings do you have towards your work experience and toward yourself?

c) Is meaningful and fulfilling work available today?

Ethical Questions Displayed with Housing Exhibit Photographs

What do we lost when an old house is destroyed?

Why are extended families important? Why are there fewer extended families today?

Why are parks and open space important to a neighborhood?

What is a "neighborhood?" Why are neighborhoods important in large cities?

How do industrial plants and factories affect the character of neighborhood

Do you think that mental institutions and rehabilitation centers should be located in residential neighborhoods? If not, where should they be located?

Are there neighborhood places like the Worms Hotel where families can get together and socialize today?

Why did Steinway Co. provide housing for their workers? Why don't employers today provide housing for their employees?

Why do historic houses form important links with our past? Do you think they should be protected from destruction?

Why were women excluded from the main barroom of Cesar's Saloon?

What do people miss when the only grass they see is lawns, and the only animals are in zoos?

Should houses in cities be uniform in design or of different designs? What is the best design for urban housing?

AUG 28 1981

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
96 Powell Library Building
University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024